

## **School Meals for All CT Testimony**

February 22, 2023

Appropriations Committee

### **HB 6659 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, and Making Appropriations Therefore. (Elementary and Secondary Education Agencies)**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Vice Chair Hartley, Vice Chair Exum, Vice Chair Paris, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio, and all the distinguished members of the committee, my name is Addie Concascia, a student at Montville High School in New London County. I am writing today to ask the Appropriations Committee for their support to expand school meal programs to provide permanent free school meals to all students.

For students, lunch is more than just a meal. It is a time to relax after a taxing exam, chat with friends over the latest gossip, and most importantly, gain the nutrition and sustenance necessary for growing teenagers. However, every day some students sit with their tablespace empty. Sometimes their heads are bowed over their phones, and other times, they talk and laugh with their friends, seemingly wholly uninterested in eating. When asked, they'll shrug and say, "Oh, I'm not hungry" or, "I'm full from breakfast." Other times, they'll answer, "I'd rather starve than pay \$3.75 for a school lunch," followed by an unaffected smile, and their friends simply nod in agreement.

A child should not have to be indifferent about going hungry, nor should they be forced to stand in the lunch line, hyper-aware of the stares at their back when the cafeteria worker announces their negative account balance. These occurrences are increasingly frequent with the rise in ALICE households (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), especially after COVID-19.

While a family may not qualify for free lunches, they can still experience the financial and emotional burden of struggling to afford them.

The passing of the universal free school meal legislation this year marks progress toward ending child hunger in Connecticut. With free school meals for everyone, children can eat without the stress or stigmas of free or reduced meal plans. Attendance will increase with my peers having a nutritious lunch to look forward to every day, not just when it's affordable; students will be more focused in class, and athletes will have the energy to put forth their best effort in sports. Moreover, free school lunches will reduce food insecurity and allow families to redistribute their finances toward other necessities.

I ask the committee to continue this progress by establishing a permanent free school meal program for all students. Every child deserves equity.

Thank you.



**Addie Concascia**

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